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The President's Daily Brief

April 4, 1975

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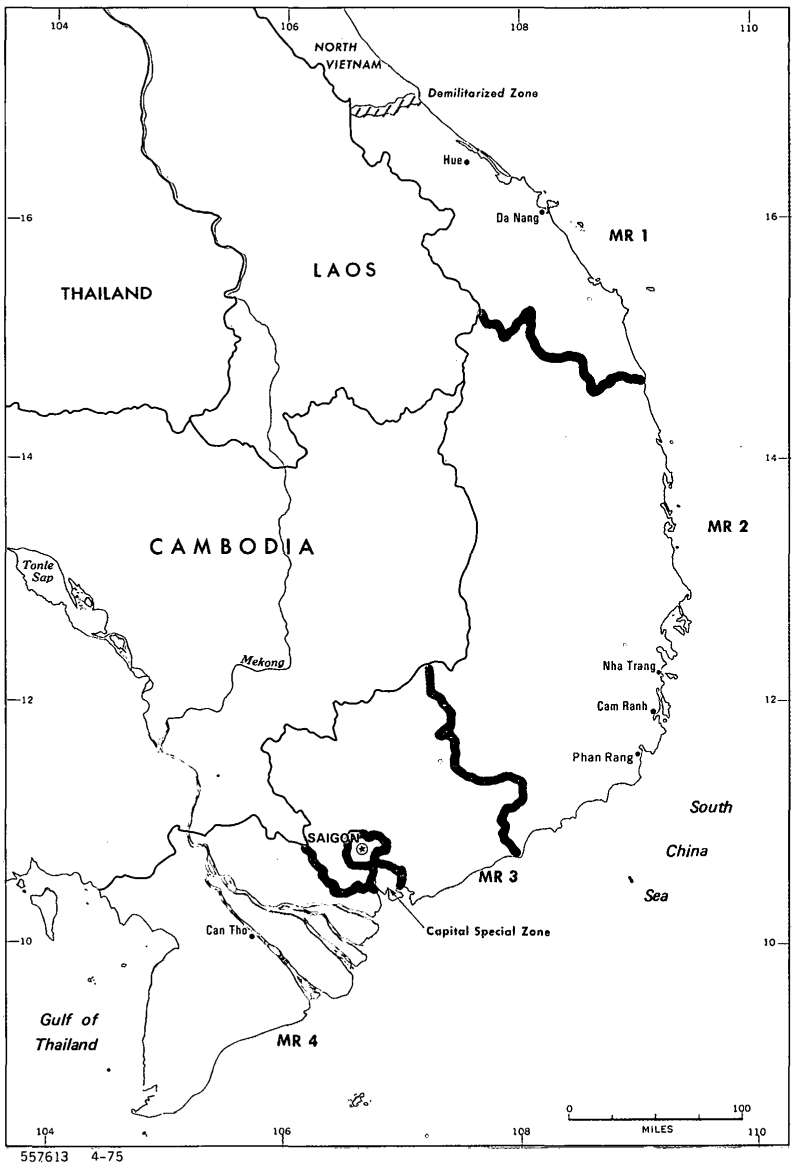

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SOUTH VIETNAM

President Thieu is acting to thwart moves to arrange his ouster, but pressure for his resignation is certain to grow.

The maneuvering against Thieu is being spearheaded by Senate president Tran Van Lam and former vice president Ky. This morning, a former presidential adviser identified with the Ky-Lam group and several other lesser figures were arrested.

Thieu earlier had requested Lam to make proposals for the reorganization of the government. Lam, armed with a unanimous Senate vote expressing no confidence in Thieu and calling for a change in leadership, is moving far ahead of what the president had in mind.

Lam proposed that the current government be replaced by a new "executive council" headed by former vice president Ky and including Lam and other "elders in politics and the army." Thieu might continue to occupy the presidency in a figurehead capacity, but Lam is suggesting that Thieu's resignation and complete withdrawal from the political scene would be preferable.

Lam's plan has the support of Ky and some senior officers such as General Vien, the chairman of the Joint General Staff. A major question, however, is whether or not Ky can command support among senior troop commanders, who would have to back a move against Thieu if it is to be successful. Ky himself does not appear to be totally confident on this score. In a conversation yesterday with an American official, Ky maintained that Thieu is unlikely to step down voluntarily, and that his removal will occur only after strong pressure is brought to bear from the South Vietnamese military or from the US.

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There have been no further serious setbacks for the South Vietnamese in the past 24 hours, but small-scale communist attacks have been increasing in both the provinces near Saigon and in the delta.

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Although action in the delta has been low in intensity, most of it is concentrated on the outer defenses of Can Tho city and adjacent military complexes which regional officials believe to be a priority target for the communists.

Saigon, meanwhile, is taking some steps it hopes may shore up the combat effectiveness and morale of the armed forces. A nine-point program has been prepared by the Joint General Staff and may soon be implemented. Among the steps to be taken is the reorganization of all ranger groups into three infantry divisions, the reassembling of armor units for the general reserve, the integration of all territorial forces into the army, and reformation of units that have been evacuated from the northern provinces.

In Military Region 2, the North Vietnamese still have not occupied Nha Trang in force and some remnants of government units remained at Cam Ranh airport as of late Wednesday. Several hundred marines, airborne troopers, and remnants of other army units have been filtering down to Phan Rang and are assembling on the town's airstrip.

North Vietnamese helicopters have been noted flying into Hue and Da Nang during the past few days. Communications from these aircraft suggest that passengers, including VIPs, are being flown into South Vietnam. It is likely that North Vietnamese civil cadre are being brought in to cope with numerous problems of organizing the civilian administration.

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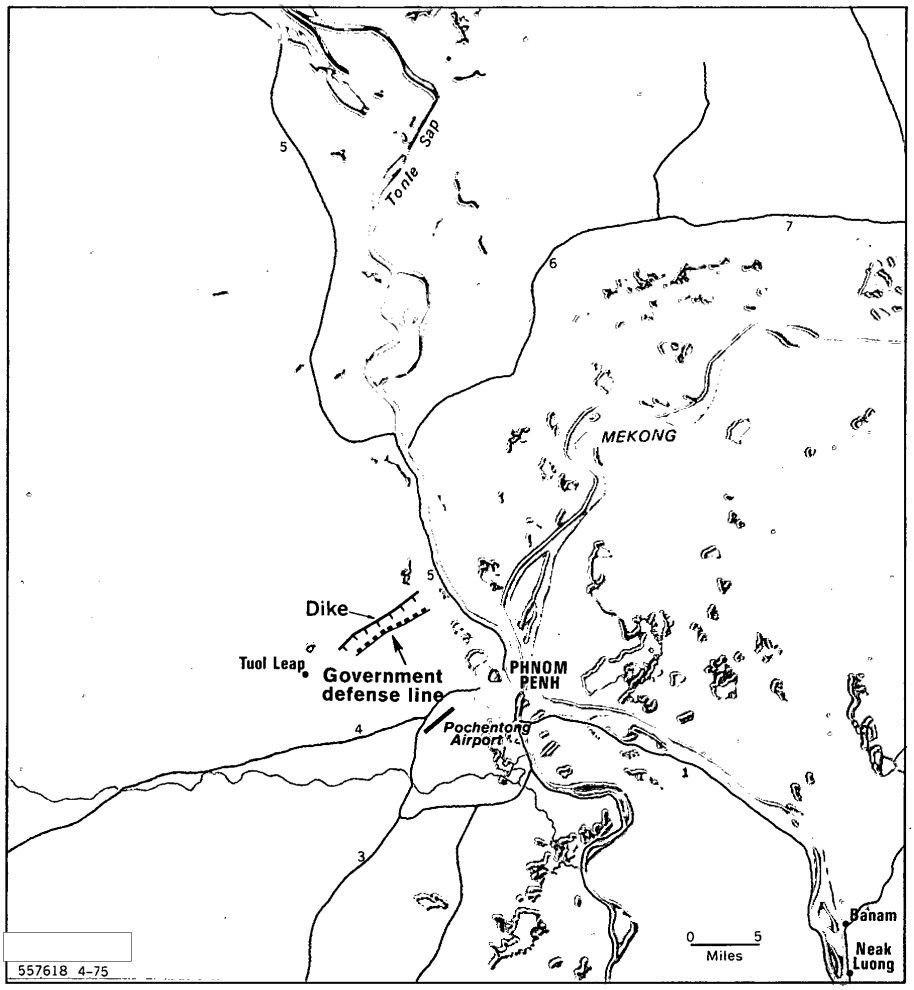
CAMBODIA: Phnom Penh Area



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CAMBODIA

Khmer communist attacks late on Wednesday forced government units to abandon positions on the dike that has formed part of Phnom Penh's northern defenses. Counterattacking government troops yesterday regained some ground in this area but not the dike itself. Inconclusive fighting continued on most other battlefronts around the capital.

Intercepted messages indicate that the communists captured a number of 105-mm. howitzers at Banam and Neak Luong on Tuesday and that insurgent forces along the lower Mekong have begun moving toward Phnom Penh.

Communist gunners fired over 20 rockets at Phnom Penh's Pochentong Airport yesterday. US airlift operations were not affected, but two Khmer air force aircraft were destroyed. The air force's steady losses are being reflected in a much reduced level of tactical sorties, and in declining morale.

Even if the airport remains open, funding for ammunition and airlift flights themselves will be exhausted shortly after midmonth. Ammunition stocks in Phnom Penh will not last through the month and certain types of ammunition will begin running out in two weeks.

Ambassador Dean reported yesterday that he and his staff believe that the government's military position will collapse completely within 48 hours to a week. They based their judgment on the movement of additional communist units toward Phnom Penh and the likelihood of increased artillery attacks against the city and the airport.

Although government officials and senior army officers are continuing to function normally, US defense attachés have noted a deterioration of morale and a mood of resignation among units in the field. Ambassador Dean also reported that the general population in Phnom Penh has remained calm only because it is ignorant of the true state of affairs.

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ISRAEL

Prime Minister Rabin expressed strong interest in bilateral discussions with Egypt before resumption of the Geneva conference during a long broadcast interview he gave on Wednesday. He gave little indication, however, that Tel Aviv is prepared to take the initiative or to be very flexible.

Rabin acknowledged there is little chance that discussions at Geneva can be successful unless "sufficient" preparations are made. Egypt, he thought, was keeping all its options open, including the possibility of bilateral talks with Israel. The recent indirect negotiations through Secretary Kissinger, he claimed, clearly demonstrated that direct contacts would be better because they reduced the chances of "misunderstandings."

The Prime Minister emphasized that the basis of Tel Aviv's negotiating position remains as expressed in last month's talks. There are three main Israeli proposals:

--A separate Israeli-Egyptian peace treaty based on an Israeli withdrawal from most of the Sinai.

--A broad interim agreement based on an Israeli withdrawal east of the Gidi and Mitla passes and the Sinai oil fields in return for termination of the state of war.

--A limited agreement based on a withdrawal from the oil fields and only the western end of the passes in return for an Egyptian "undertaking" not to use force to solve its conflict with Israel.

Although Rabin claimed Israel would not change these proposals, he did hint at flexibility by saying that they contained a wide range of "nuances." He said a detailed discussion of these could lead to progress toward peace. Reflecting an attitude

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that has long colored Israel's approach to the Middle East conflict, Rabin reiterated that Israel could only negotiate from a position of strength. He argued that the government must proceed slowly under present circumstances because, he claimed, Israel's willingness to negotiate in the wake of Egypt's recent rejection of Tel Aviv's proposals could be interpreted by the Arabs as a sign of weakness.

Rabin expressed confidence that US disappointment with the lack of results in last month's negotiations would not adversely affect US-Israeli relations over the long term. He suggested that the unhappiness of some US administration "officials" with Israel was perhaps partly attributable to their desire for a Middle East agreement to compensate for problems in "other spheres and areas." The Prime Minister drew on his long experience as ambassador to Washington to judge that the US public is aware of Israel's unique situation.

Rabin's remarks, as well as numerous press articles highlighting Israel's desire for pre-Geneva talks, have already drawn the ire of Israel's conservatives, who detect a possible softening of the Israeli negotiating position worked out last month. One commentator with good contacts among senior conservatives in Rabin's Labor Party yesterday pointedly asserted that Rabin was speaking only for himself.

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USSR - MIDDLE EAST

Soviet officials still formally support an early reconvening of the Middle East peace conference, but a strong note of caution has crept into their comments now that this has become a real prospect.

In part, this attitude can be traced to the Soviets' surprise over the sudden breakdown in the disengagement talks. Even up to the last days of Secretary Kissinger's mission, Soviet officials talked as though they expected the peace conference to be held after the parties had reached further agreements.

Beyond their surprise, however, the Soviets are clearly suspicious that the US will continue to dominate the negotiations. Their apprehension can only have grown when both Israel and Egypt recently suggested that the US could go on mediating outside of Geneva.

The Soviets must be chagrined by Cairo's recent pronouncements indicating that Geneva is not the only negotiating avenue, and by its invitations to the UK, France, Yugoslavia, and India to participate in the conference. The Soviets have probably been disabused of any notion that the disengagement breakdown would cause Egypt to be more amenable to Soviet views.

Another thorny problem for Moscow is the question of Palestinian representation. Moscow has appeared hopeful that a Syrian-Palestinian command might provide a way out of its commitment to participation of the Palestinians at some stage in the conference.

In addition to tactical problems, the Soviets must be wary of the implications of a failure at Geneva. Having invested substantial capital in the idea that Geneva provides the only solution to the Arab-Israeli problem, they probably foresee considerable damage to their prestige if the conference fails.

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GREECE-TURKEY

The likelihood of a serious incident in the Aegean Sea is growing as Greece and Turkey appear increasingly ready to risk confrontation to back up their conflicting claims in the area.

Our embassy in Athens has been informed by the Greek government that two Turkish aircraft violated Greek airspace yesterday, while another 18 Turkish planes flew a patrol nearby. Greek aircraft in the area were ordered by higher authorities not to engage the Turkish planes. Antiaircraft batteries on the islands opened fire, but apparently were not effective.

The Turks, meanwhile, reportedly are planning to "take strong retaliatory action" to any Greek attempts to intercept Turkish aircraft. [redacted] 25X1

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[redacted] The Turks are said to be locating Greek military concentrations in order to retaliate with bombings if the Greeks open fire on Turkish planes. 25X1

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CYPRUS

Greek and Turkish Cypriot leaders apparently have agreed to resume their interrupted peace talks on April 25 in Vienna.

Initial press announcements did not state who would participate in the talks, but Rauf Denktash and Glafkos Clerides probably will at least open the negotiations. Denktash, who now holds the position of president of the recently proclaimed Turkish federated state of Cyprus, may be replaced with an individual of lesser stature. This would suit Cypriot President Makarios, who would like to be able in turn to replace Clerides, whom he has criticized as too lenient a negotiator.

The Turks, who had previously balked at an active role for UN Secretary General Waldheim, have agreed to let him participate in the first week of the negotiations.

Greek Prime Minister Karamanlis remains anxious to get the Cyprus problem behind him, and would probably show some flexibility if the Turks were willing to withdraw from some areas they now hold. The Greek Cypriots continue to hope that the cutoff of US military aid to Turkey will make the Turks more amenable to concessions.

Although there is a consensus in Ankara that territorial concessions are necessary, the US embassy in Nicosia reports indications that the Turks continue to move toward a de facto separation of the two communities on the island. The Turks have now settled virtually all of the migrants from the south in former Greek villages in the north, and are in the process of making the north self-sufficient in such things as electrical power.

A Turkish Cypriot constitution--drafted in mainland Turkey--was completed on March 26 and has been forwarded to the island's Turkish Cypriot constituent assembly for approval. The draft constitution provides all the accoutrements of an independent state; the only concession to the Greek Cypriots is an admission that the constitution may be amended "when the constitution of the federal Republic of Cyprus is put into force."

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